



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702

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NOAA FISHERIES SEEKS PUBLIC INPUT ON CARIBBEAN CORAL STATUS

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) is conducting a status review of three Caribbean acroporids (elkhorn coral, staghorn coral, and fused staghorn coral). To maximize public involvement in the status review and to ensure that NMFS receives the best available scientific and commercial data for its listing determination, NMFS will hold two public meetings to seek input on the following specific issues:

- (1) Historical and current distribution and abundance of these three acroporids throughout the Gulf of Mexico, tropical portions of the Atlantic Ocean, and the Caribbean Sea specifically in the Bahamas (particularly southern), Nicaragua, Pedro Banks, northern Cuba, Virgin Gorda, Antigua, banks off of Turks and Caicos, Saba Banks, Trinidad and Tobago, and eastern Caribbean;
- (2) historic and current condition;
- (3) population status and trends;
- (4) information on any current or planned activities that may adversely impact the three corals, especially related to the five listing factors identified below;
- (5) ongoing efforts to protect the three acroporids and their habitat;
- (6) areas that may qualify as critical habitat; and
- (7) approaches and criteria that could be used to assess listing potential of these acroporids as either threatened or endangered (e.g., viability assessments, extinction risk, etc.).

NOAA Fisheries will accept this input at the meetings and during a comment period that will end January 4, 2004.

NOAA Fisheries is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce and is charged with protecting marine, estuarine, and anadromous species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). NOAA Fisheries conducts status reviews when it receives a petition that includes substantial information that indicates an ESA listing may be warranted. According to ESA listing criteria, a species may be listed if it is determined to be threatened or endangered for any one of the following reasons:

- Present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of habitat or range;
- over-utilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes;
- disease or predation;
- inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms;
- other natural or manmade factors affecting its continued existence.

The Center for Biological Diversity petitioned NOAA Fisheries on March 4, 2004 to list elkhorn, staghorn and fused-staghorn coral as threatened or endangered throughout their known range, and to designate critical habitat under the ESA. In June 2004, NOAA Fisheries found that the petition presented substantial information indicating that the petitioned action may be warranted and solicited information about the three acroporids. These public meetings are being held to maximize public involvement in the status review and to ensure that NOAA Fisheries receives the best available commercial and scientific data for its listing determination. You may submit comments by any of the following methods:

- E-mail: Acropora.Info@noaa.gov.
- Fax: 727-570-5517, Attention Ms. Jennifer Moore.
- Mail: Comments on paper, disk, or CD-ROM should be addressed to the Assistant Regional Administrator for Protected Resources, NMFS Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive North, Suite 102, St. Petersburg, Florida 33702
- At the following meetings:

Tuesday, December 14, 2004, Key Colony Beach, FL, 2:00-3:00 pm
Key Colony Beach City Hall, 600 West Ocean Drive, Key Colony Beach (Marathon), FL;
305-289-1212

Wednesday, December 15, 2004, Dania Beach, FL, 7:00-9:00 p.m.
Courtyard by Marriott Hotel, 400 Gulf Stream Way, Dolphin Room, Dania Beach, FL; 954-342-8333

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving the nation's living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management, and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to customers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

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